

Career Counseling at the Universities: The Bangladesh Scenario

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Doi: 10.19044/esj.2017.v13n28p381 [URL:http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/esj.2017.v13n28p381](http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/esj.2017.v13n28p381)

Abstract

In the backdrop of growing diversity of educational programs and jobs this paper looks into the needs and realities of career counseling at the university level with particular reference to the public and private universities of Bangladesh. A sample of 72 universities was taken by random selection for the study. Qualitative data for six aspects of career counseling viz., existence of career counseling center, presence of professional career counselor, arrangement of career fair or job fair, internship placement services, job placement services, and existence of alumni association were then collected from the websites of these universities and/or over phone as was necessary. Collected data were analyzed using the statistical tools of tabulation, proportions, and chart. It was found that half of the universities of Bangladesh – both public and private – virtually do not have career counseling programs. The universities of Bangladesh need to recognize the importance of career counseling and employ attention and efforts in pertinent activities for their own interest.

Keywords: Career counseling, Career development, Career Center, Career counselor

Introduction:

With the fast pace of technological development in the modern times the realms of education and work are changing rapidly. Universities are coming up with new programs and new jobs are emerging that did not exist before. Students now-a-days face a vast maze of options and choices of education and jobs. This often gives rise to confusion that needs to be resolved as early as possible. Here, career counseling comes into play. Career counseling helps a student set his/her career goals by exploring

his/her interests and potential. Career counseling has a broad domain. It's not just helping the student to find a job. It starts even before admission to the university.

Ideally, the student should have selected a career goal before entering into the university. If not, the university is the last stand where he/she should be able to make a career decision and pursue education accordingly. Thus, existence of career counseling facilities at the universities is essential.

In the developed countries career counseling facilities essentially exist at the universities. But in a developing country like Bangladesh the scenario may be different. This paper attempts to find out the condition of career counseling at the public and private universities of Bangladesh.

Research Question:

The primary research question was: What proportion of the universities of Bangladesh have career counseling programs? This was followed by the secondary research question: Do the existing career counseling programs meet the contemporary standard?

Career Counseling:

Career counseling is a part of career development process. Career development is more than just deciding on a major and what job a student wants after graduation. It really is a lifelong process, meaning that throughout one's life one will change, situations will change, and one will continually have to make career and life decisions. Career Counseling is a process that will help a student to know and understand his/her own self and the world of work in order to make career, educational, and life decisions. The goal of Career Counseling is to not only help a student make the decisions he/she needs to make at the present, but to give him/her the knowledge and skills needed to make future career and life decisions. (Boise State University, 2017)

Career counseling is a largely verbal process in which a counselor and counselee(s) are in a dynamic and collaborative relationship, focused on identifying and acting on the counselee's goals, in which the counselor employs a range of diverse techniques and processes, to help bring about self-understanding, understanding of behavioral options available, and informed decision making in the counselee, who has the responsibility for his or her own actions (Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 1996).

Career counseling basically consists of four elements: (a) helping individuals to gain greater self-awareness in areas such as interests, values, abilities, and personality style, (b) connecting students to resources so that they can become more knowledgeable about jobs and occupations, (c) engaging students in the decision-making process in order that they can

choose a career path that is well suited to their own interests, values, abilities and personality style, and (d) assisting individuals to be active managers of their career paths (including managing career transitions and balancing various life roles) as well as becoming lifelong learners in the sense of professional development over the lifespan (Post, Borgen, Amundson, & Washburn, 2002).

Career Counseling at the Universities:

Career counseling is critical in successfully establishing a connection between the worlds of education and work. (Cojocariu & Cojocariu, 2015). With the increasing number of universities and diversity of jobs an ever rising number of students are facing the confusion regarding the choice of the correct university to attend and a profession in accordance to their education (Chircu, 2014).

Universities need to have career centers. A career center is typically an administrative unit of an organization that employs staff who deliver a variety of career programs and services (Garis, Reardon, & Lenz, 2012). Thus existence of such an administrative unit by any name implies the commitment of the concerned university to provide career counseling services.

Ideally, these centers would have a group room for workshops and groups, space for the career library, individual offices for career counselors and career advisors, and several computers with internet access. The activities of the career counseling centers include establishing liaison with employers, alumni, and families of students, arranging workshops, presentations, and job fairs, and providing work experience to students. These work experiences might include co-operative programs, apprenticeship, job shadowing, and volunteer work or mentorship (Post, Borgen, Amundson, & Washburn, 2002).

Career centers provide services of career counselors. Career counselors serve as teachers, confidants, and advisors to their clients. They help people examine their interests, styles, and their abilities to find and enter the profession that best suits them (The Princeton Review, 2017). Presence of professional career counselors indicates university's serious and active role in career counseling.

Career counselors have specialized training in career counseling and career development. They may also have additional training in personal counseling as well as in group counseling. They facilitate career development groups for students or counsel students individually. Counselors can assist students in various areas. Some examples include increasing self-awareness, decision making, goal setting and establishing a plan of action. (Litoiu & Oproiu, 2012)

Arrangement of career fair or job fair on a regular basis has to be done by universities as part of career counselling activities. Career fairs are an excellent opportunity for students and employers to engage. Employers who are hiring are invited onto campus to showcase their company and discuss employment opportunities with a focused group of job-ready students and graduates (University of Ontario Institute of Technology, 2017).

Another important aspect of career counseling programs is internship placement services. Internship gives students a feel of working in the professional environment and get hands on experience. It also helps understand if a particular job is of the student's interest and he/she would want to build career in it (Freshersworld.com, 2017).

Job placement services are also part of effective career counseling and guidance programs. Job placement is the process by which educational institutions help their students find work. The job placement department of a university or post-secondary institute typically has a representative who works with students to provide job leads and help with interview skills (McQuerrey, 2017).

Alumni association is an immense network of professional contacts. Alumni could be a great resource for informational interviews or introductions (Adams, 2017). Existence of an active alumni association is important for career counseling. The merging of alumni relations and career services is a trend in higher education that acknowledges the strategic importance of network building and the role key stakeholders can play in preparing students for the work world. From an organizational standpoint, combining alumni relations with career services is a potential first step to adding more strategic importance and message focus to the work of stakeholder engagement. (Catherwood, 2017)

In the developed countries universities provide career counseling through designated establishments. The universities have interactive websites that facilitate the students to know about and obtain the services they provide. For example, the Princeton University's Career Services website states that their mission is to help their students define a unique career and life vision, and then connect them in multidimensional, personalized ways to the resources, people, organizations and opportunities that will enable them to make their visions a reality. Princeton Career Services offers a breadth of services and programs to help current students and alumni with every aspect of career exploration and development. The process is highly individualized with dedicated career advisers having special expertise in diverse fields and industries (Career Services at Princeton University, 2017).

Methodology:

This study looked into six aspects of career counseling viz., existence of career counseling center, presence of professional career counselor, arrangement of career fair or job fair, internship placement services, job placement services, and existence of alumni association.

Qualitative data for each of these aspects were collected from the websites of different universities and/or over phone as was necessary. These data were then analyzed using statistical tools of tabulation, proportions, and chart.

The number of universities in Bangladesh in both public and private sectors constituted the population for this study. This is a finite population of 135 universities (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, 2017). The sample size n for estimating population proportion was therefore determined using following formula (Islam, 2015):

$$n = \frac{Nz^2pq}{Nd^2 + z^2pq}$$

Where N is the size of the finite population i.e., total number of universities (135). p is the assumed proportion of universities having career counseling facilities and q is the assumed proportion of universities that do not have it. These unknown proportions were assigned an equal value of 0.50 to be unbiased. z is the standard normal deviate which was set at 1.96 corresponding to 95% confidence level. Finally, d - the allowable maximum error in estimating population proportion - was arbitrarily set at 0.08. The sample size n then came to 72. Accordingly, 72 universities out of the total 135 were selected randomly for data collection.

The Bangladesh Scenario:

Education in Bangladesh has three major stages-primary, secondary and higher educations. Primary education is a 5-year cycle with the entry age of 6 years while secondary education is a 7- year one with three sub-stages: 3 years of junior secondary, 2 years of secondary and 2 years of higher secondary. Higher secondary is followed by graduate level education at colleges/universities. (Secondary and Higher Education Division, Education Ministry, 2017).

To study the Bangladesh situation of university level career counseling following 6 aspects of career counseling were considered as these appeared to be the necessary components for a standard career counseling program:

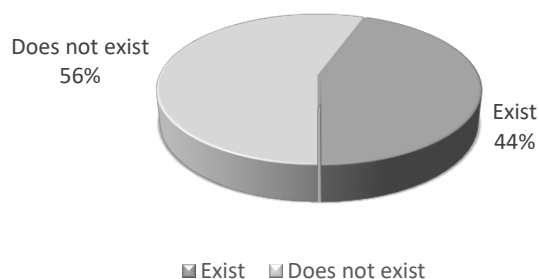
1. Existence of Career Counseling Center
2. Presence of Professional Career Counselor
3. Arrangement of Career fair or Job fair
4. Internship placement services

5. Job placement services
6. Existence of Alumni Association

There are 40 public and 95 private universities in Bangladesh (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, 2017). Out of these 135 universities a sample of 72 universities was taken and their activities on the above mentioned 6 elements of career counseling were studied.

It was found that only 32 of the 72 universities have some sort of career counseling centers. Thus majority of the universities (56%) do not have career counseling centers. The following pie chart would give a snap shot of the situation:

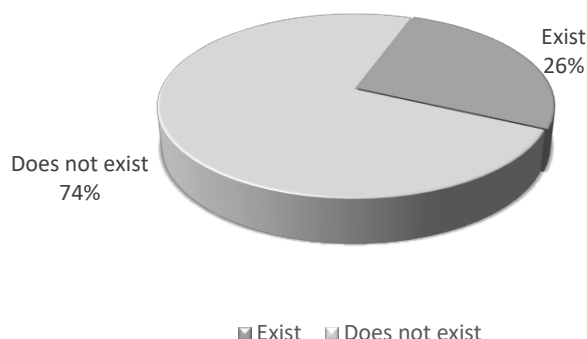
Chart-1: Existence of Career Counseling Center



It may be noted here that most of the above 32 centers do not have adequate facilities like dedicated rooms, computers with internet access, space for library etc.

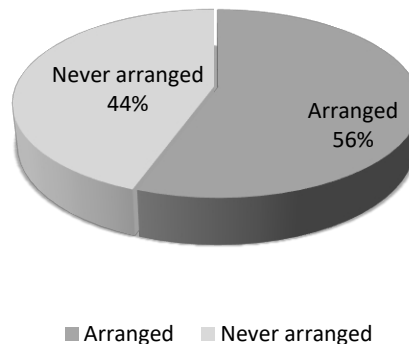
Again, out of these 32 career counseling centers only 19 i.e., 59.38% have Professional Career Counselors and/or Career Advisors. In terms of total population the presence of Professional Career Counselors and/or Career Advisors is only 26% as is shown in the following chart (Chart-2):

Chart-2: Presence of Professional Career Counselors



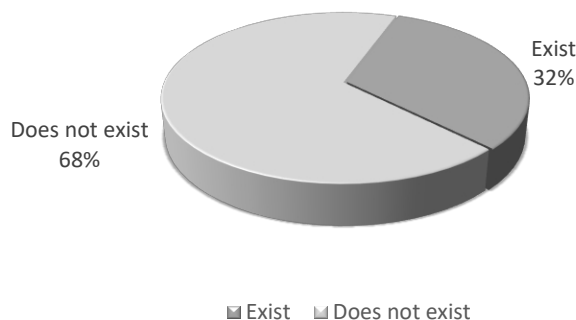
Regarding arrangement of job fair or career fair it was found that 40 of the 72 universities have arranged job fairs or career fairs. However for most of these 40 universities these were not regular events. Again, many such fairs were actually arranged by the students' career clubs - not directly by university authorities. It may be noted that 44% of the universities never arranged any kind of job fair or career fair. Chart-3 gives a visual shot of the position.

Chart-3: Arrangement of Job fairs or Career fairs



Another aspect of career counseling programs is providing internship placement services. This is quite an important service since internship provides students an opportunity to check out their own potential in their respective areas of interest. Also, it is an opportunity for gaining exposure in the world of work and making headway for future employment. It was however found that 49 of the 72 universities were not providing internship placement services. The following chart (Chart-4) shows the picture:

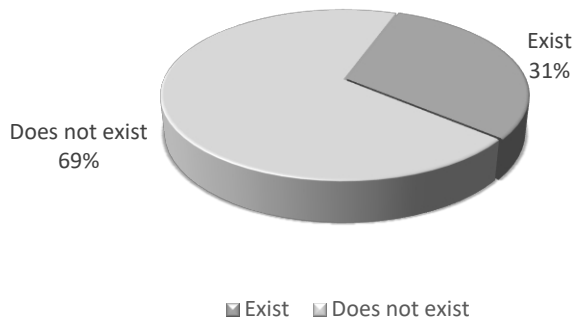
Chart-4: Existence of Internship Placement Service



As for the job placement services the situation was found to be almost the same as internship placement services. Only 22 universities were

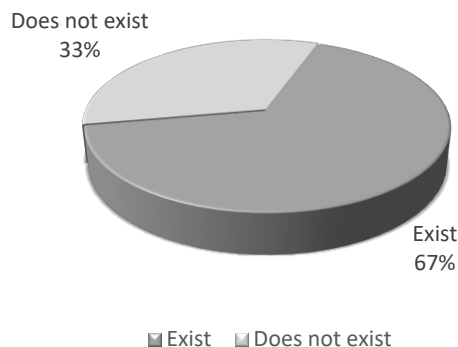
providing job placement services. The following pie diagram (Chart-5) shows the position:

Chart-5: Existence of Job Placement Service



Finally, the existence of alumni association was surveyed. The position is presented in Chart-6. It was found that 48 out of the 72 universities have alumni associations. However, all of them were not sponsored by the university authorities. In some cases it was found that only a few departments have their individual alumni associations instead of comprehensive coverage. In some other cases it was found that alumni activities were performed by the students' career clubs.

Chart-6: Existence of Alumni Association



The following tables and chart present an overall picture of the situation existing on the six aspects of career counseling in the sample of 72 universities selected at random basis. Table-1 presents a collective position of the situations described by chart-1 through chart-6. Table-2 describes the distribution of the number of career counseling aspects present in the sample universities. Chart-7 depicts the corresponding picture. It may be seen that 14 universities do not have any career counseling activities at all. From this

we can conclude with 95% confidence that over 19% of the universities of Bangladesh do not undertake any sort of career counseling activities. Similarly, it can be seen that 15% of the universities perform only one function of career counseling and another 16% of the universities perform only two functions of career counseling. These two functions are formation of alumni association and arrangement of job/career fairs. It was noted while describing situation on these two functions using chart-3 and chart-6 that they were performed rather irregularly and inadequately. Thus, 31% (15%+16%) of the universities have virtually no career counseling facilities. If these 31% of the universities are counted with the 19% of the universities that do not undertake any sort of career counseling activities then it can be said that 50% of the universities of Bangladesh have virtually no career counseling facilities.

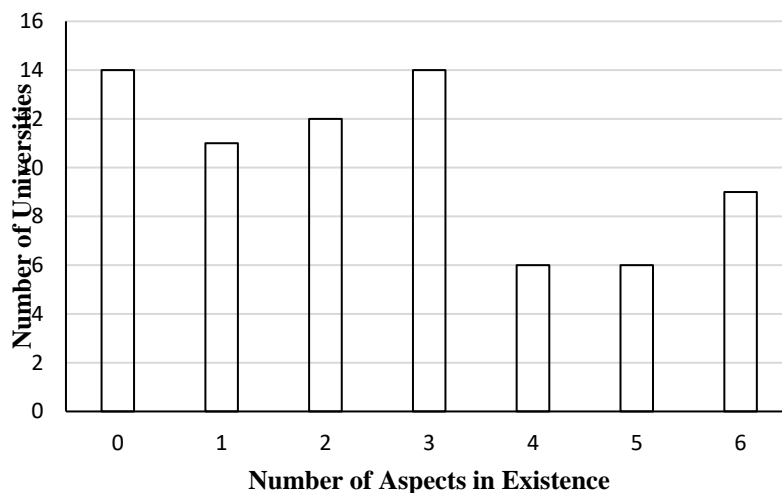
Table-1: Existence of the Six Selected Aspects of Career Counseling in the 72 Universities

| Aspect: Status: | Career Counselin g Center | Professiona l Career Counselor | Job/Caree r Fair | Internshi p Placemen t | Job Placemen t | Alumni Associatio n |
|---|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Number of Universitie s where the aspect exists | 32 (44%) | 19 (26%) | 40 (56%) | 23 (32%) | 22 (31%) | 48 (67%) |
| Number of Universitie s where the aspect does not exist | 40 (56%) | 53 (74%) | 32 (44%) | 49 (68%) | 50 (69%) | 24 (33%) |
| Total | 72 | 72 | 72 | 72 | 72 | 72 |

Table-2: Number of Career Counseling Aspects Present in the 72 Universities

| Number of Aspects in Existence | Number of Universities where the number of aspects mentioned in the left column exists |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 0 | 14 |
| 1 | 11 |
| 2 | 12 |
| 3 | 14 |
| 4 | 6 |
| 5 | 6 |
| 6 | 9 |

Chart-7: Number of Career Counseling Aspects Present in the 72 Universities



Conclusion:

The primary research question was: What proportion of the universities of Bangladesh have career counseling programs and the secondary research question was: Do the existing career counseling programs meet the contemporary standard? The answer came out that half of the universities of Bangladesh - both in the public and private sectors – virtually do not have career counseling programs and those who have it do not conform to the contemporary standard i.e., do not include the six essential elements viz., existence of career counseling center, presence of professional career counselor, arrangement of career fair or job fair, internship placement services, job placement services, and existence of alumni association.

It is evident that the required attention and efforts on the part of the universities with regard to career counseling is somehow nonexistent.

The public and private universities of Bangladesh need to recognize the importance of career counseling. Proper career counseling can contribute to reduction of student drop outs. As mentioned by Hossain & Naeema each year 0.25 million students are passing out from universities whereas 1.2 million are enrolling (Hossain & Naeema, 2013). Therefore, the rate of dropout must be quite significant.

The prevalence of unemployment in Bangladesh is greater among the higher educated section of the youths than the less educated youths (Haque, 2017). The employment scenario of Bangladesh has a strange feature. On the one hand there is a large number of young people who have tertiary education but no employment and on the other hand there is a large number

of jobs to be filled by highly qualified people in industries (a significant portion of which has been occupied by migrant workers) (Ahmed & Azim, 2016). In this situation career counseling at the university level can contribute to remove the gap between the offerings of the graduates and the requirements of the employers by aligning students' career goals with job market situation, providing job placement services etc.

According to the Self-Assessment Manual of the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP) quality of graduates is mostly measured by their employability. However, all types of jobs are not necessarily suitable for all graduates and hence HEQEP calls for Career counselling and placement arrangement at all the public and private universities of Bangladesh so that the students can get the right job opportunities and select a suitable career (Ministry of Education, University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project, and Quality Assurance Unit, 2014).

The name of a university lives with its students. Throughout their lives the students identify themselves as graduates of their respective universities. As the graduates enter into work life they carry the name of their universities with them. If they are not well placed or perform poorly at their jobs the image of their university goes down with them. Hence, the responsibility of the university should not end with providing a degree rather they should be concerned about the placement of their graduates in the society for their own interest.

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